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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001998

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: THE MILITIA THREAT, PETER KARIM, AND  
UGANDAN INFLUENCE

REF: KINSHASA 1950

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary. PolCouns and PolOff visited Bunia November 28-30 to review ongoing efforts by MONUC, civil society, local government and NGOs to bring peace and stability to the historically volatile region. Militia violence continues to threaten these efforts despite recent offensives by the Congolese military backed by MONUC forces. One militia leader in particular, known by the alias Peter Karim, has recently gathered militia forces and engaged Congolese troops in the areas around Mahagi and Aru. There appears to be a deliberate attempt to conceal the true identity of this individual. Officials in Bunia believe he is operating with assistance from Uganda with the intent of destabilizing the larger Ituri District. His actions appear to substantiate these suspicions. End Summary.

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MILITIAS IN ITURI: SMALLER BUT STILL A THREAT  
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12. (C) In a series of meetings with PolCouns and PolOff November 28-30, officials from MONUC headquarters in Bunia discussed the ongoing peace process in Ituri District in eastern DRC. (Note: A full readout of these and other meetings during the visit will be reported septel. End note.) MONUC officials reported a positive overall picture of the situation in Bunia, saying Ituri District was clearly moving away from the carnage which had enveloped the region for the last few years. Officials admitted many challenges remain, especially eliminating the remnants of militia groups throughout the District.

13. (C) Of particular concern to MONUC officials is the activity and violence of the Revolutionary Movement of Congo (MRC), a loose affiliation of remaining militia groups in Ituri District. MONUC officials say the MRC is an attractive option for some young men who find themselves without job opportunities. The MRC, consequently, provides these (largely) young, uneducated men with a sense of purpose and structure, in addition to a life of relative power over others. MONUC officials say they have no reliable estimates of the number of active MRC members, but estimate those under the command of local leader Peter Karim to be around 500.

14. (C) MONUC officials said the MRC's goal is to destabilize Ituri. Officials also believe the MRC has Ugandan backing, and that individuals in the GOU may be using the MRC to wield influence by proxy across the border. MONUC officials said they have reliable reports of small arms trafficking by the militias from locations in Uganda and other countries in east Africa. With such support, small pockets of militias remain a "big headache" for MONUC and the Congolese military.

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WHO IS PETER KARIM?  
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15. (C) A new militia leader who recently has emerged in Ituri goes by the name Peter Karim. In late November, MONUC and Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) troops engaged in a series of firefights against Karim and militia elements reportedly under his command (reftel). MONUC characterizes Karim as a local businessman and illegal trader and a member of the local Lendu ethnic group. MONUC officials believe Karim is a former commander with the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) during the civil war in DRC who was particularly known for his cruelty. MONUC officials believe Karim is now engaged in militia activity solely for economic reasons. His goal is to increase his illegal trade of wood and gold across the border with Uganda in exchange for arms.

16. (C) However, other officials in Bunia give a different opinion as to the identity of Peter Karim. Petronelle Vaweka, Ituri's District Commissioner, told PolCouns and PolOff during their visit that she believes there are two men who are going by the name Peter Karim. The first Karim is, as MONUC officials described, a Congolese who fled to Uganda during the war, acquired Ugandan citizenship and returned to the DRC a little over a year ago. A friend of RCD/KL leader Mbusa Nyamwisi, this Karim lives in Butembu and runs his illegal trade from there. This "original" Peter Karim is different from the man now conducting militia activities in

Ituri.

17. (C) Vaweka said the other Peter Karim in question is an ethnic Abdu (her own tribe) whose original name was Udalla. She speculated that they may even be cousins. Vaweka recalled having met this man a few months ago while negotiating the release of two MONUC Moroccan soldiers being held hostage by militia forces. Vaweka said Karim/Udalla went to Uganda about two years ago and probably received Ugandan military training with Jerome Kakalele, the former commander of the Peoples Armed Forces of Congo (FAPC). Vaweka said Karim/Udalla was returned to the Mahagi and Aru areas of Ituri District by the Ugandans with the sole goal of destabilizing the region. In addition, he was given the name "Peter Karim" in order to confuse security authorities as to his true identity and the source of his military support. Vaweka said Karim/Udalla has reportedly been seen receiving assistance from Ugandan intelligence and military advisers.

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